

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 17, 2013

The Honorable Charles T. Hagel
Secretary of Defense
100 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Hagel:

I continue to be deeply concerned about the backlog of veterans disability claims at VA Regional Offices around the country, including the Winston-Salem Regional Office (WSRO) in North Carolina. At the WSRO, it takes an average of 333 days to complete a new claim. Additionally, there are nearly 11,000 appeals pending at the WSRO with some veterans waiting as long as four years for a ruling.

In an information paper signed by the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Readiness and Force Management earlier this year, the Department admitted that as much as 70 percent of the time it took to process these claims was time spent waiting for DoD to transfer Service Treatment Records to the VA. This is unacceptable. Faster transfer of electronic medical records from DoD to the VA would go a long way toward ensuring we live up to our commitment to America's veterans and their families and should be a priority.

In 2004, Congress created the Joint Executive Committee to increase information and resource sharing between the VA and DoD so that the kind of backlogs we are dealing with now could be avoided. However, the wait times for veterans have only gotten worse since then. I am extremely concerned that the various initiatives in this Joint Strategic Plan meant to ensure better communication between service branches and VA may not be completed on time by 2015. Failure to fully implement this plan will only add to the issues we are facing in veteran claims and appeals as well as servicemember care.

I am requesting that the Department report to me on the status of implementing the Joint Executive Committee Joint Strategic Plan to streamline the process of transferring Service Treatment Records between DoD and VA as well as among the different service branches. I pride myself on my unwavering support of our servicemembers and veterans and your immediate attention to this request is appreciated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Kay R. Hagan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Kay R. Hagan
United States Senator